UNITED
NATIONS

ST

Secretariat

ST/IC/1997/23
8 April 1997

INFORMATION CIRCULAR

To: Members of the staff at Headquarters

From: The Assistant Secretary-General for Human Resources Management

Subject: LANGUAGE PROFICIENCY EXAMINATIONS

1. In accordance with General Assembly resolution 2480 B (XXIII) of 21 December 1968 concerning the need to maintain linguistic balance within the Organization, language proficiency examinations are held to confirm the written and spoken knowledge of the official languages of the United Nations, and consequent eligibility for language-related incentives.

2. The next language proficiency examinations in Arabic, Chinese, English, French, Russian and Spanish will be held on Tuesday, 23 September, and Wednesday, 24 September 1997.

3. Eligibility for the language proficiency examination is as follows:

(a) All staff members of the Secretariat and other organizations of the United Nations system who have permanent and probationary contracts are eligible to take the United Nations language proficiency examination;

(b) Staff members who have fixed-term contracts are eligible to take the language proficiency examination, provided that their contract expiration date is after the date of the examination for which they are applying. Those whose contract expires before this date must obtain authorization from their executive officer in the space provided on the examination application form;

(c) Staff members who have short-term contracts are not eligible to take the language proficiency examination unless they have authorization from their executive officer in the space provided on the application form;

(d) All those who have completed the highest level of the United Nations language programme are eligible to take the language proficiency examination. This is the only situation in which the language proficiency examination is open

to those who are not staff members of the United Nations Secretariat and other organizations of the United Nations system.

4. All candidates must also meet the following two eligibility requirements:

(a) Source of proficiency. Since each candidate taking the language proficiency examination represents an expense to the Organization, the examination is restricted to those whose background indicates that they possess a level of proficiency equivalent to the highest level of the United Nations language programme. Such indicators include completion of the last level of the United Nations language programme (compulsory for non-staff members), language study outside the United Nations for at least two years, and use of the language on a regular basis for school or work. Other indicators are permissible; they should be specified on the application;

(b) Completion of the highest level of the United Nations language programme is required for those who have begun study in the programme. Without such completion, the language proficiency examination may not be taken in the language studied.

5. Language incentive eligibility requirements for United Nations staff members:

(a) A staff member may take a language proficiency examination to obtain a certificate establishing proficiency in a second official language and, in certain cases:

(i) To benefit from the relevant provisions of General Assembly resolution 2480 B (XXIII);

(ii) To qualify for the first or second language allowance under staff rule 103.6;

(b) Resolution 2480 B (XXIII) applies to Professional and higher-level staff members subject to geographical distribution who work in one of the working languages of the Secretariat and who have an adequate and confirmed knowledge of a second official language. The criteria for benefiting from the language incentives provided for under the resolution are set out in administrative instruction ST/AI/207 of 23 December 1971;

(c) Under staff rule 103.6 staff members in the General Service and Trades and Crafts categories or in the Field Service below level 6 are eligible for language allowances. Staff members must be proficient in two official languages and must pass the language proficiency examination in one of them to receive the allowance. To receive a second language allowance they must be proficient in three official languages and must pass the proficiency examination in two of them. Staff members whose mother tongue is an official language of the Organization must pass the examination in another official language, which may be the language in which they are required to be proficient by the terms of their appointment. The language proficiency examination in their mother tongue is waived. Staff members whose mother tongue is not one of the official languages must pass the examination in an official language other than that in

which they are required to be proficient by the terms of their appointment. The proficiency examination in that language is waived.

Registration procedure and schedule

6. Those wishing to take the language proficiency examination in September 1997 must submit an application form to the Training and Staff Development Service (room S-606, ext. 3-7056). A separate application must be submitted for each language examination requested. Staff members may register in room S-606 between 1 and 3 p.m. from 23 to 27 June 1997 and from 10 to 19 September 1997.

7. Successful candidates must pass BOTH the written and oral parts of the examination with a minimum score of 65 per cent in each part.

8. In certain cases in which candidates receive a score of 80 per cent or more on the written examination but fail the oral, the jury adjudicating the examination will review the cases and may allow candidates to retain their written score for the following examination session, for which they must fill out a new application form. In such cases, candidates will receive written notification of the jury's decision and will have to retake only the oral examination at the following session. The same consideration cannot be given, however, for the oral test or to candidates who have not taken both parts of the examination at the same session.

9. The schedule for the written examination for the September 1997 session is as follows:

Tuesday, 23 September 1997

English ..... 9 a.m. to 12.30 p.m.

Chinese ..... 2 p.m. to 5.30 p.m.

Russian ..... 2 p.m. to 5.30 p.m.

Wednesday, 24 September 1997

French ..... 9 a.m. to 12.30 p.m.

Arabic ..... 2 p.m. to 5.30 p.m.

Spanish ..... 2 p.m. to 5.30 p.m.

Candidates are advised to arrive 15 minutes before the start of the examination time in order to allow for check-in procedures.

10. The oral examination will consist of individual 15-minute interviews. Candidates will be given interview appointments at the time of their registration.

11. The number of the conference room in which each examination will be held will be posted in the Secretariat Building on the fourth, fifth and sixth floor bulletin boards and on those in the DC-1, DC-2, and DC-3 buildings. Candidates should check the bulletin boards, as individual notices are not sent for the written examinations.

12. Copies of sample examinations can be obtained in room S-606.

13. Candidates will receive written notification of their examination results by mid-November 1997. No results will be available prior to official notice.